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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 001530

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF A/S FRAZER, AF/SPG, SE WILLIAMSON, NSC
FOR BPITTMAN AND CHUDSON

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TAGS: PGOV PHUM PREL UN SU

SUBJECT: MINNAWI SEES NOTHING NEW IN BASHIR INITIATIVE

REF: A. KHARTOUM 1528

1B. KHARTOUM 1521

Classified By: CDA Alberto M. Fernandez, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: A skeptical Minni Minnawi will spend the next several days trying to get full GOS implementation of a September 2008 accord which sought to implement the May 2006 Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) at the same time that the much hyped but (so far) underwhelming Sudan Peoples' Initiative gets underway. If the confidence building measures are not taken, Minnawi intends to return to the field in North Darfur and weigh his options. Minnawi also described the confused and divided ranks of both Darfur rebels and the Khartoum regime. End summary.

¶2. (C) Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) leader and Senior Assistant to the President Minni Minnawi told CDA Fernandez on October 17 that he saw "absolutely nothing new" in the much ballyhooed Sudan Peoples' (Ahl al-Sudan) Initiative (SPI) launched on October 16 at Friendship Hall in Khartoum (septel). Despite his skepticism, he was going to attend the initial follow up meetings in the Gezira State sugar mill town of Kanana on October 17 before returning to Khartoum. Minnawi will spend the next 2-3 days trying to get full implementation of confidence building measures agreed to by VP Ali Osman Taha last month in El Fasher.

¶3. (C) Chief among these steps are the first installments of the Development and Reconstruction Fund and Compensation Fund outlined in the DPA, some official appointments to positions in Darfur, funding for the TDRA, and the full establishment of security mechanisms outlined in the 2006 agreement and confirmed in the September 2008 El Fasher meeting. Minnawi said that VP Taha told him that the financial steps would wait upon the return of Finance Minister Awad al-Jaz who is now back and indeed was present at the Initiative's gala opening. "If they can't come through in the next few days, I will return to Darfur and, believe me, it will not be good for the NCP," he warned.

¶4. (C) Minnawi had spent much of the previous day meeting with dignitaries visiting Khartoum to support the SPI. He warned the Qatari Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Libyan Representative Ali Treiki, and Arab League Chief Amr Moussa that "the Arabs have zero credibility with the people of Darfur" and that "if you are trying to save President Bashir in order to be able to save Darfur, you have it backwards." It is a breakthrough on Darfur that can help the President, not the other way around. He noted that, while the Libyans and Eritreans know a lot about Darfur's complex reality, the Arab League and Qataris are superficial in their understanding and instinctively take the ruling National Congress Party's (NCP) side, to the detriment of Darfur and its people. CDA agreed and noted that most Arab regimes naturally gravitate towards each other, "they don't care much

for their own people, why should they care about those in Darfur?" Minnawi agreed but asked that the US pressure the Qatars not to blindly follow the Khartoum regime's suggestions.

¶4. (C) Minni outlined the results of his discussions with non-signatories in Darfur over the past few months. He said that while SLA/Unity had initially leaned towards uniting with him, Minni's rival and relative Suleiman Jamous had lately encouraged SLA/Unity to draw closer to Khalil Ibrahim and JEM. Minnawi said that SLA/Unity's progression into a motley band of robbers and cutthroats was proceeding rapidly and fingered an SLA/Unity faction as involved in the September 2008 kidnapping of European tourists in Southwestern Egypt. Minnawi said that rebel commanders Bahar Abu Garda, Adam Bakheit, Ali Mukhtar, and Khamis Abdullah were still in talks with him but had not yet committed. At one point, they were so close that they asked Minni to summon UNAMID and the press for an announcement on the SLA's reintegration but JEM's and Jamous's machinations had prevented it at the last moment.

¶5. (C) Minnawi said that, despite fears in Khartoum of another imminent, spectacular JEM attack such as the May 2008 Omdurman raid, "Khalil is just not that strong yet". He has not yet absorbed SLA/Unity and is trying to pick off some forces from Minnawi to strengthen his hand. "He is not ready to attack" one of Darfur's state capitals but has standing orders from Chadian President Deby to fall on the West Darfur capital of El Geneina when and if Chadian rebels supported by Khartoum make another lunge towards Ndjamena.

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¶6. (C) The former rebel leader described the NCP as "still divided about whether or not to take big steps towards peace in Darfur." While VP Ali Osman Taha has worked hard to woo Minni back, hard-liners like Presidential Assistant Nafie Ali Nafie and MOD Abdel Rahim Hussein are up to their usual tricks. Minnawi had complained to Taha about regime attacks burning villages in the Muhajeria region of South Darfur even as the SPI conference was getting underway. Taha had responded that the attacks were caused by Arab (Maaliya) tribal militias and not directed by Khartoum. Minni responded that the Maaliya and janjaweed don't have helicopters, and his people had observed logistical support provided to the Maaliya by SAF choppers, "it is (MOD) Abdelrahim doing this, just as his boss President Bashir talks about peace."

¶7. (C) Comment: Minnawi described a paradoxical reality that, just when the actual parameters of a potential Darfur deal can be dimly perceived (accelerated UNAMID deployment, a revitalized peace process coupled with early concessions from Khartoum, Arab funding for development and compensation), both rebel ranks and the apparently monolithic NCP seem to be in disarray and unsure about how best to proceed. He is absolutely right that many regional powers in Africa and the Middle East seem more concerned with saving President Bashir's skin from a possible ICC jail cell than coming up with a peace deal acceptable to Darfur's fractious rebel groups and restless civilian population. End comment.

FERNANDEZ